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E.O. 12356: OADR
TAGS: PREL PROP NU, US
SUBJECT: ORTEGA'S RESTRAINED REACTION TO HOUSE VOTE ON
CONTRA FUNDING

ROME FOR EMBASSY VATICAN (INFO)

1. (C) SUMMARY. DANIEL ORTEGA'S PUBLIC REACTION TO THE HOUSE VOTE AGAINST U.S. AID TO THE ARMED OPPOSITION WAS LOW KEY AND CAUTIOUS. HE DID NOT CROW NOR DID HE SPECULATE ABOUT POSSIBLE FUTURE CONGRESSIONAL ACTION, BUT HE AGAIN CHARACTERIZED THE WHOLE CONGRESSIONAL CONSIDERATION OF THE ISSUE AS ILLEGAL AND IMMORAL. HE ALSO TOOK A BRIEF SWIPE AT CATHOLIC CHURCH LEADERS. HE CONVEYED THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS PESSIMISTIC, THAT HE THOUGHT CONGRESS EVENTUALLY WOULD VOTE FUNDS. FSLN DAILY BARRICADA'S TREATMENT OF THE ISSUE GAVE THE SAME IMPRESSION, AND ITS EDITORIAL GRIMLY SPECULATED WHEN AND HOW CONTRA FUNDING MIGHT BE APPROVED. ORTEGA'S RESTRAINED RHETORIC FIT THE PATTERN OF THE CURRENT SANDINISTA LOW PUBLIC PROFILE ON THE ISSUE, WHICH WE THINK WILL CONTINUE WHILE CONGRESS IS CONSIDERING IT. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) DANIEL ORTEGA PROVIDED THE OFFICIAL GON REACTION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES VOTE DISAPPROVING THE ADMINISTRATION'S FUNDING REQUEST FOR AID TO THE NICARAGUAN RESISTANCE. IN A TELEVISED PRESS CONFERENCE THE EVENING OF MARCH 20, ORTEGA'S TONE WAS MEASURED, RESIGNED AND RELATIVELY LOW KEY. HE CHARGED THAT CONGRESSIONAL DEBATES OF THE MATTER WERE, IN THEMSELVES, "ILLEGAL, IMMORAL...COUNTER TO INTERNATIONAL OPINION...WE REJECT AS SUCH THE DISCUSSION AND THE POLICY OF DISRESPECT FOR THE INTERNATIONAL JURIDICAL ORDER." ORTEGA REFERRED SEVERAL TIMES TO THE CONTINUATION OF THE CONTRA MILITARY THREAT AND MENTIONED THE RECENT REPORTED DEPLOYMENT ALSO OF "5,000 HONDURAN SOLDIERS TO THE BORDER WITH NICARAGUA," BUT HE AVOIDED SPECULATING ON FUTURE ACTION

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BY THE U.S. CONGRESS, SAYING THAT THE GON "WILL NOT PROVIDE OPINIONS ABOUT THE SHADES OF OPINION WHICH ARE IN DISCUSSION WITHIN THE NORTH AMERICAN CONGRESS." STATING THAT "WE CONFRONT A GREAT DANGER" FROM U.S. INVASION, HE CALLED ON NICARAGUANS TO SUPPORT NATIONAL DEFENSE WITH GREATER PRODUCTIVITY AND SACRIFICE. ORTEGA NOTED THAT THE GON WAS WILLING TO "NORMALIZE" RELATIONS WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HIERARCHY, MENTIONING THAT SOME MEMBERS OF THE HIERARCHY HAD BEEN SUPPORTING THE REAGAN POLICY AND THUS HAD BEEN LOSING MORAL AUTHORITY. HE ALSO ALLEGED THAT IT WAS THE U.S. INTENTION TO "VIETNAMIZE" THE NICARAGUAN CONFLICT, CITING THE PLANNED USE OF MILITARY ADVISERS, AND TOOK THAT AS A SIGN THAT THE USG HAD RECOGNIZED THAT THE RESISTANCE WAS BEING BADLY DEFEATED. HE PREDICTED THAT EVEN WITH SUCH ADVISERS "THEY WILL NOT BE ABLE TO BEAT US BECAUSE THOSE FORCES DO NOT HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THE PEOPLE, AND LATER THEY ARE GOING TO HAVE TO SAY: WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO USE NORTH AMERICAN TROOPS, THE MARINES!"

3. (U) FSLN DAILY BARRICADA MARCH 21 CARRIED A FRONT-PAGE EDITORIAL WHICH EXPLORED POSSIBLE FUTURE CONGRESSIONAL ACTION IN SOME DETAIL. IT CHARACTERIZED THE MARCH 20 HOUSE VOTE AS A "TEMPORARY WEAKENING" OF ONLY ONE OF THE "WARLIKE ALTERNATIVES" FACING THE GON. BARRICADA ALSO TRACED THE 1985 VOTES ON THE SUBJECT, NOTED THE INTRODUCTION OF ANTI-AIRCRAFT MISSILES INTO THE WAR AND THE COMMENCEMENT OF U.S. AID TO COSTA RICAN SECURITY FORCES, AND CONCLUDED THAT "PRESIDENT REAGAN WAS ABLE TO IMPOSE A CONSENSUS IN THE U.S. CONGRESS, AMONG DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS ALIKE, CONCERNING MILITARY SOLUTIONS FOR CENTRAL AMERICA, SPECIFICALLY AGAINST NICARAGUA. LOOKING AHEAD, BARRICADA OPINED THAT THE SENATE WOULD APPROVE A "VARIANT OF THE REAGAN PROPOSAL" ON MARCH 24, WHICH WOULD BE THE "OFFICIALIZATION OF A DECLARATION OF WAR." BARRICADA ALSO ASSERTED THAT, IN THE HOUSE, FOUR OUT OF SIX "DEMOCRATIC PROPOSALS...SUPPORT THE MILITARY SOLUTION" AND WERE THEREFORE "TRUE TRAPS FOR THE REVOLUTION." DISTINCT FROM THOSE FOUR PROPOSALS, THE PROPOSAL OF CONGRESSMAN LEVINE WAS TERMED "MORE WORTHY" OF DISCUSSION. FINALLY THE EDITORIAL OPINED THAT PRESIDENT REAGAN'S "ANTI-COMMUNIST SPEECH" (PRESUMABLY OF MARCH 16) HAD "PROFOUNDLY PERMEATED THE DISCUSSIONS IN THE PAST DAYS AND THE DEMOCRATS HAD TO ROW STRONGLY AGAINST THE CURRENT TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY WERE NOT 'PRO-COMMUNISTS' OR SIMPLY 'ANTI-PATRIOTS' FOR NOT SUPPORTING THE PROPOSAL FOR 100 MILLION." THUS, THE EDITORIAL CONCLUDED, NICARAGUANS MUST BE "MORE VIGILANT THAN EVER... THE DISCUSSION IN THE CONGRESS IS NOT OVER YET..."

4. (U) THE PRO-SANDINISTA DAILIES ON MARCH 21 CONTINUED TO NOTE PUBLIC STATEMENTS ELSEWHERE AGAINST CONTRA AID. BARRICADA CONTAINED STORIES MENTIONING STATEMENTS BY THE BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE SPOKESMAN, THE VENEZUELAN CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, THE PUERTO RICAN SOCIALIST PARTY, GRAHAM GREENE, VARIOUS MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND PRESIDENT CEREZO OF GUATEMALA (A PRENSA LATINA ITEM FROM CARACAS). EL NUEVO DIARIO HIGHLIGHTED A RECENT NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIAL ON LACK OF PROOF OF SANDINISTA COMPLICITY IN NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING AND BRAZILIAN AND ARGENTINE REACTIONS TO MENTION OF THOSE COUNTRIES IN THE PRESIDENT'S MARCH 16 SPEECH, AS REPORTED BY AP.

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5. (C) COMMENT: ORTEGA'S TELEVISED REMARKS IN REACTION TO THE MARCH 20 HOUSE VOTE CONTINUED THE CAUTIOUS SANDINISTA PUBLIC POSTURE ON THE CONTRA AID ISSUE FIRST NOTED IN EARLY MARCH. WE EXPECT THAT TONE TO CONTINUE. SANDINISTA EXPECTATIONS ABOUT FUTURE CONGRESSIONAL ACTIONS, HOWEVER, APPEAR VERY PESSIMISTIC; THEY PROBABLY WILL CONTINUE MUTED REACTIONS TO THE U.S. LEGISLATIVE PROCESS AS A DAMAGE-LIMITING TACTIC, RATHER THAN TO TURN THE CONGRESS AROUND.

6. (C) RATHER THAN HIS CUSTOMARY GREEN UNIFORM, ORTEGA WORE A SUEDE JACKET AND AN OPEN COLLAR SHIRT AT HIS MARCH 20 PRESS CONFERENCE, APPARENTLY CONCERNED TO IMPRESS U.S. AND OTHER VIEWERS WITH A NON-MARTIAL IMAGE WHILE DEFENDING HIS REGIME AGAINST U.S. MILITARY AID TO HIS OPPPOSITION. BERGOLD

END OF MESSAGE

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